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UNCLAS CHIANG MAI 000196

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM TH PREF PGOV

SUBJECT: CHIANG RAI HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ATTACKED

11. Summary. While human rights and environmental activists in northern Thailand have become accustomed to verbal threats directed against their work, an August 18 grenade attack in Chiang Rai's Mae Fa Luang
12. Wiwat Tamee, a Thai-Lisu coordinator for the Joint Operation Center for Redressing the Problems of the Highlanders, part of the Ethnic and
17. Although other NGOs working on citizenship and forestry issues have received verbal threats, this is the first case of violence they can recall.
13. The grenade, which Wiwat described as a type popular among the Border Patrol Police and some military units, was lobbed into the vehicle parked in the Mae Fa Luang District, Chiang Rai. While the explosion did not cause severe damage or injury, it frightened the villagers and prompted one staff member to quit his job.
14. Local police failed to investigate while district officials inspected the scene without reaching any conclusion. Disappointed at the lack of action by the local authorities, Wiwat and his colleagues filed a complaint August 23 with the National Human Rights Commission.
15. Half of Wiwat's group has remained in the village to train and educate villagers about their rights to Thai citizenship. Their effort is coordinated with local self-government Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAO) together with grass roots NGOs and local schools.
16. Wiwat explained that his work runs counter to the interest of officials from village and district levels who have taken advantage of the hill tribes' lack of citizenship.
17. Since kicking off the citizenship education effort this month in the Mae Salong Nai area, Wiwat's team has faced other forms of interference. The district office reportedly alerted local officers and military units about the presence of a group who might interfere with the profits being made on the citizenship application.
18. Other groups working in the Mae Fa Luang district have reported similar intimidation tactics. A group of local teachers at Ban Thoed Thai School was cautioned by the district office for bringing in unauthorized alien students, even though the classes were approved by the Ministry of Education. Another NGO, the Center for the Hill Tribes' Education under the support of PLAN International-Northern Program has also been subject to discouraging gestures from local authorities.
19. Sakda Saenmi, who heads a hill tribes NGO in Chiang Mai known as the Inter-Mountain People's Education and Culture in Thailand Association.
10. Comment: Hill tribe citizenship issues are complicated and contentious. With registration often dependent on the say-so of local authorities and district officials to rake off a little money. It is not surprising that an NGO trying to by-pass the bureaucracy would meet with opposition. It would be surprising if the grenade-thrower(s) were caught.

CAMP